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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT OF DASD WHELAN: AFRICOM

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Spogli for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary: Your visit to Italy offers an opportunity to engage the GOI at the highest levels on the pending issue of U.S.- GOI consultations on AFRICOM component headquarters in Italy. Initial readings from top-level Italian civilian officials are encouraging. However, the devil will be in the details of just what we will ask and what legal basis we will need to allow AFRICOM to accomplish its goals from Italy. The longer we wait for authorization from State and OSD to begin consultations, the less likely it becomes that we will be able to finalize negotiations in time for the already ambitious October 1 target. It will be important for you to be prepared to present the USG strategic vision of AFRICOM to your GOI interlocutors. They will want to hear the bigger picture, including what we are thinking on AFRICOM HQ locations. End Summary.

12. (C) Embassy Rome will engage the GOI on U.S. plans for AFRICOM as soon as we receive authorization from State and OSD. Time is short if we hope to secure GOI concurrence for the projected AFRICOM component headquarters in Vicenza and Naples in time to reach Full Operational Capability by the current target date of October 1, 2008. Many details will require careful attention. Ambassador Spogli briefed PM Berlusconi's chief Political Adviser Gianni Letta on the broad outlines of AFRICOM plans regarding Italy on July 2. Letta responded positively, noting that hosting AFRICOM in Italy would be consistent with Italian strategic, humanitarian and development goals in Africa. Letta indicated that Italy might be open to hosting AFRICOM HQ, and said he certainly hoped we would chose Italy over Spain.

13. (C) In addition to securing political support, the Embassy expects there will be complicated legal issues arising out of the 1954 Bilateral Infrastructure Agreement (BIA) that governs the U.S. military presence in Italy. The BIA only authorizes U.S. use of facilities "within the spirit and framework of NATO collaboration" unless otherwise agreed to by the GOI. Using U.S. Forces based in Italy for non-NATO missions is sensitive. In the past, Southern European Task Force (SETAF) in Vicenza has, however, been able to deploy troops on humanitarian and peacekeeping missions to Africa after obtaining concurrence from the MOD on a case-by-case basis. CNE Naples has exercised command-and-control functions for U.S. Navy humanitarian and capacity-building operations in Africa (Africa Partnership Station). To move from a case-by-case basis to permanent ongoing operations will put us in uncharted legal territory. There could also be potential difficulties with regard to obtaining Italian visas for African trainees, since they would not be eligible to enter Italy under the NATO SOFA. Should we decide to base the AFRICOM Command HQ here, a full bilateral agreement on its presence and operations may be required.

14. (C) Your GOI interlocutors will look to you for guidance on how the U.S. plans to approach these issues over the coming months. In addition, we will need to work closely with the Italians to keep separate the two strands of AFRICOM and the planned expansion of the U.S. base in Vicenza to include the Dal Molin airfield. The Embassy does not plan to begin in-depth negotiations with the GOI on AFRICOM until all outstanding issues related to the Dal Molin project have been fully resolved. The earliest date at which we expect to have resolved the outstanding Dal Molin issues is shortly after July 29 when the lower court's injunction enjoining the Dal Molin expansion project is expected to be reversed. Once we have an agreement with Italy, whatever its contours, we will need to work closely with our MOD and MFA colleagues on the legal and public diplomacy aspects of AFRICOM. With Italy closing down for summer holidays in less than two weeks, securing agreement by October 1 is a formidable challenge. We look forward to your visit as a key means to advance the issue.

SPOGLI